

Congresswoman NYDIA M. VELAZQUEZ

Representing New York's 12th Congressional District
Ranking Democratic Member, House Small Business Committee



NYCHA Urged to Address Housing Concerns in NYC

Concerns regarding the New York City's Housing Authority's (NYCHA) FY 2004 Annual Plan were addressed by Congresswoman Velázquez when she highlighted the need for swift action to assuage the affordable housing crisis plaguing New York City.

"Like everyone else here, I strongly support increasing the supply of affordable housing – and applaud the City's willingness to find creative solutions to the housing crisis," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "However, it must be a collaborative effort involving all of the stakeholders. Only by working together will the City regain its reputation for being on the forefront of providing safe, decent, affordable housing for all its citizens. The waiting list for public housing is nearly 120,000 families long. The list for Section 8 housing is at nearly 140,000 families – and has been closed for eight and a half years. Homelessness is at a ten-year high. This crisis needs to be taken care of – and fast."

Congresswoman Velázquez addressed several issues that NYCHA needs to revisit, including the Community Service Requirement, which as of January

1, 2004, would force approximately 70,000 tenants to submit to community service duties or face eviction. The concern is that retirees under 62, the ill and the disabled, parents of small children, pregnant women and battered women would not be protected from this rule. Congresswoman Velázquez urged NYCHA to make exceptions under such circumstances.

In her testimony, Congresswoman Velázquez called NYCHA's decision to return to using the Council of Presidents (COP) instead of a democratically elected Resident Advisory Board (RAB) "unacceptable." A return to the COP system not only will fail to adequately represent the over 600,000 tenants, but it also does not meet HUD regulations for an equal and fair RAB.

"This is not the first time that I have been worried about NYCHA's apparent lack of concern for the public process," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "During the previous City Administration, NYCHA representatives lacked regard for the comments made by many of its stakeholders. It is not enough to go through the motions of community involvement – our comments and suggestions should be seriously considered for the final plan."

Velázquez Continues to Fight for NYC's Small Businesses

Congresswoman Velázquez, Ranking Democratic Member of the House Small Business Committee, made key changes to the Small Business Administration's (SBA) Disaster Loan Program to aid small businesses in NYC still suffering from the events of 9/11 and the sluggish economy.

"In just two months we will observe the two year anniversary of September 11," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "It has not been an easy two years here. Throughout the city, business owners were faced with unprecedented business losses, unemployment, factory closings and infrastructure obstacles. While there were many small businesses that received some assistance, given the economic situation, they continue to struggle."

A program that provided financial relief to New York City small businesses post September 11 was the SBA's Disaster Loan Program. This program approved approximately 5,700 loans totaling about \$475 million in the New York City disaster area. But some of those small businesses that did receive SBA loans are now carrying debt and trying to survive in a weak economy.

In an effort to help these businesses, Congresswoman Velázquez included a provision in the SBA reauthorization for loan deferment. This would require the SBA to suspend borrower loan payments for between 2 and 5 years if the business would suffer substantial economic injury from repaying the loan. Business owners would then benefit from a cash infusion, without having to worry about the debt dragging down their enterprise or accruing interest on their loan.

"The SBA's Disaster Loan Program was important to providing capital and stabilizing businesses in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks,"



Congresswoman Velázquez speaks at City Hall regarding NYC small businesses.

Congresswoman Velázquez said. "What we are finding now, though, is that due to the war with Iraq, the SARS scare and a weakened economy, businesses are still hurting, with many just a few months away from closing their doors. These changes will give small business owners the time they need to get their businesses back on track."

It is the hope of Velázquez, as the legislation works its way through the process, to turn this deferment provision into an outright grant proposal in the final bill, which will be considered by Congress sometime this fall.

\$250K Awarded to Cypress Hills Local Development Corp.

An AmeriCorps grant for more than \$250,000 was recently awarded to the Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation (CHLDC) by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

“I have collaborated with the CHLDC throughout my tenure in Congress and I have seen firsthand how highly capable and deserving this institution is,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “The CHLDC is a wonderful asset to the community and has greatly impacted both the health and security of our neighborhood and its institutions. In the field of education, the CHLDC’s recent accomplishments have garnered city-wide attention for their innovativeness, using a strong commitment to community-based schools and parental involvement as a foundation.”

The funding will go towards utilizing AmeriCorps volunteers for after-school services in order to expand and enrich CHLDC programs. Currently, students in Cypress Hills are performing well below the state and national averages, and the volunteers would work in conjunction with

the CHLDC to improve the quality of educational services throughout the area.

“We are extremely grateful for this funding and all of the support that Congresswoman Velázquez has shown to help us get this grant,” said Executive Director of CHLDC, Michelle Neugebauer. “Congresswoman Velázquez is a fierce advocate for our community, particularly for youth and education. It is only fitting that she helped us to obtain this funding that will allow us to enhance and expand educational services to numerous children throughout our area.”

The CHLDC and AmeriCorps share similar missions of holistic community building. The CHLDC is committed to community-based schools and parental involvement and is a full-service community based organization. CHLDC works to revitalize the community through economic development, housing preservation and supporting the positive development of our youth and their families.

Fight to the Finish for Head Start Funding

Congresswoman Velázquez spoke out in opposition on the House floor regarding the School Readiness Act of 2003 (H.R. 2210) because of its threat to the future of the Head Start program in New York.

“The work we do here in Congress is all about priorities – and the decisions we make are a measure of what we value as a nation,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “What this bill shows us very clearly is that low-income children are again not a priority for our president and the Republican leadership.”

Currently, there are over 3,000 children enrolled in 30 Head Start programs in Rep. Velázquez’s district. Almost 90 percent of those children are living in families that receive public assistance or have incomes below the federal poverty line.

In addition to early childhood opportunities, these children receive important medical and social services through Head Start. In fact, 97 percent of Head Start children that live in the Congresswoman’s district receive health care and 96 percent have a continuous source of dental care through their services. This program has also provided mental health services to hundreds of local chil-

dren as well as assistance to children with disabilities.

The changes put forth by this legislation would cause children and families to lose the federal guarantee that provides early education programs, medical and dental care, mental health assessments and other services. By favoring a “block grant” approach, which fails to designate funding for specific Head Start services, the program could be easily eliminated.

“I am outraged by this bill, but I am not surprised,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “The Republican leadership constantly praises family values, yet its legislative agenda so clearly fails to value American families. This legislation jeopardizes funding, slashes critical health services, weakens educational standards, and repeals civil rights protections.”

For almost 30 years, the Head Start program has assisted low-income preschool children and their families, establishing a comprehensive early-learning environment and assisting children and families with a variety of medical and social needs that affect educational performance. The program has provided services to over 20 million children nationwide since its inception in 1965.

Velázquez Strongly Opposes TGE Power Plant in Brooklyn

At a public hearing, Congresswoman Velázquez issued a statement expressing her strong opposition to a proposal for a 1,100-megawatt TransGas Energy (TGE) power plant along the East River of the Brooklyn waterfront. The hearing highlighted the threat that this power plant would pose to the area’s economic and residential environment.

“I oppose the power plant for many reasons, with health being a major concern,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “Air pollution in the Williamsburg and Greenpoint community continues to trigger thousands of asthma attacks among its residents. It is unjust to ask this neighborhood to bear the brunt of another power plant. If permitted, this will result in the unfair clustering of plants along the North Brooklyn waterfront and violate the recently approved Greenpoint and Williamsburg Waterfront 197-a plan, as well as New York City’s Waterfront Revitalization Plan.”

The plant would be the only heavy-industrial facility, distributing over one thousand tons per year of toxic emissions into what is already one of the most environmentally overburdened areas in the country.

The construction proposal for TGE was given a first-round approval by the New York State Board on Electric Generation Siting and the Environment. The facility would occupy the former Bayside Fuel Oil site on North 12th Street on the Williamsburg-Greenpoint border in Brooklyn. Since the first-round approval, much objection has emerged from members of the community and local elected officials, including Rep. Velázquez.

“After years of fighting industrial polluters that profited at the expense of our health, the Williamsburg Greenpoint community is working to revitalize and develop its waterfront,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “Williamsburg and Greenpoint have carried this unfair burden for too long. Tonight, let us end the unjust condition and treatment. Oppose the TGE power plant.”

Grants Awarded to Our Community

Corporation for National and Community Service

*Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation
\$251,588
For utilizing Americorps volunteers for after-school services.

U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services -- Office for Children and Families.

*Yeled V'Yalda Childhood Center
\$6,012,170
For full year and part day Head Start services to handicapped children.

U.S. Dept. of Justice -- Office of Justice Programs

*New York City Gay and Lesbian Antiviolence Project
\$300,000
For the Violence Against Women Office Technical Assistance Program.

U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security

*State of New York Division of Criminal Justice Service
\$135,266,607
For an Urban Areas Security Initiative Grant Program.

U.S. Dept. of Justice -- Office of Justice Programs

*New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services
\$7,661,500
To develop programs to promote greater accountability in the juvenile justice system.

U.S. Dept. of Transportation -- Federal Transit Administration

*Metropolitan Transportation Authority (NYC)
\$13,278,362
For a project providing Long Island commuter service to New York's East Side.